

The dynamics of south/north relationships within transnational debt campaigning

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Abstract

This article examines power relations within transnational debt campaigns between southern and northern groups, with a particular focus on the high profile Jubilee 2000. It examines various fault-lines between southern and northern campaigns, and explores different explanations for these difficulties. It conceptualises this crucial relationship for the power of transnational campaigns, as a dynamic one driven by the continual interaction of solidarity and conflict, as campaigns struggle to resolve the power inequalities, which are reflected into transnational campaigns by the hierarchical structuring of world order. It concludes that transnational debt campaigning involved two interacting struggles. The struggle to create, and maintain, a strong common cause across transnational debt groups, interacted with the struggle to achieve debt cancellation. This was due to the fact that the different methods and discourses used by debt campaigns generated tensions, particularly along the south/north interface. The article suggests that claims for the emergence of a 'post-sovereign' global civil society are premature, and therefore unitary transnational campaigns are problematic, and likely to be shaped by particular political and cultural contexts, rather than representing a claimed universal agenda.

Keywords: transnational debt campaigns, solidarity, south-north relations, hierarchical world order.

Introduction

While transnational campaigning grew rapidly over the course of the second half of the twentieth century, paralleling the globalisation of the world economy, movements crossing borders have a long history. Among significant transnational movements of the nineteenth century, were the anti-slavery campaigns, and the labour movement which, from its inception, had an international structure and internationalist outlook (Waterman 2001). The women's suffrage movement also had transnational links through the International Woman Suffrage Association, established in 1904 (Keck and Sikkink 1998).

The debt crisis of the last quarter of the 20th century gave rise to one of the most sustained and long-running campaigns of the more recent phase of transnational campaigning, involving people from across six continents. The debt crisis enveloped Latin America and Africa, with the Philippines as the main country affected in Asia. The crisis is officially dated to August 1982 when

Mexico, a major debtor, announced it could no longer service its debt, and many other countries across the south of the globe faced the same situation. This development posed a threat to the international financial system as many international banks were over exposed to southern governments. Debt, however, had already emerged as a major threat to the lives and livelihoods of people in indebted countries. Peru and Jamaica were virtually bankrupt from 1976 (Walton 2001), but as these were not systemically important countries, their debt crises did not pose a similar threat to international banks as did Mexico's crisis. Their governments, however, were forced to follow IMF programmes, in order to be eligible for new loans or debt re-scheduling. These programmes included devaluation leading to higher prices for imported goods, and a reduction in public spending, including slashing subsidies on essential goods, such as food and energy, and also wage reductions. Popular debt protests took place in Peru from 1976 in opposition to these programmes (Walton 2001), and sparked off the first recorded example of transnational solidarity on debt - the US/Peru solidarity group set up in the late 1970s by returned missionaries (Donnelly 2002).

This article is based on research carried out on three decades of debt campaigning from the last quarter of the 1970s up to 2005, focussing in particular on the later period, the Jubilee 2000 campaign. My motivation for undertaking this research was that I had spent twelve years working within transnational debt campaigning. A key question which arose for me during that time was: why did we, as civil society groups scattered across the globe, believe we could force change from the G7, IMF and World Bank; in short, what was our power? The concept of the power of campaigns/ social movements/civil society groups used in this research starts with Lukes' (2005, 69) understanding of power as the potential, to "make or to receive any change, or to resist it". Leveraging power as potential, transnational civil society campaigns/social movements make common cause, based on shared understandings of the nature of the problem, possible solutions, and how to work together to press for these solutions. Common cause, however, is always somewhat fragile with tensions continually emerging, leading to new understandings, and sometimes to reconfiguration of the campaign group, or splits.

While tensions within movements/campaign groups can arise for a range of reasons, a major fault-line within transnational campaigning is between southern and northern groups (Doherty and Doyle 2012, Bendaña 2006, Katz 2006, Scholte 2002, Keet 2000, Keck and Sikkink 1998, Pasha and Blaney 1998). This relationship is, therefore, a key consideration for the power of transnational campaigns. In terms of how to resolve the south/north fault-line within transnational civil society, some suggest that the inequalities can be tackled by action from northern NGOs to 'empower' the south (Katz 2006). I argue, however, that the south/north relationship within transnational debt campaigning was a dynamic one, driven by the continual interaction of solidarity and conflict, as campaigns struggled to resolve the power inequalities, which are reflected back into transnational civil society from a hierarchical world order. Within this process, southern agency is key to challenging the

inequalities within transnational campaigns, and maintaining the tension which drives the relationship towards seeking a more equitable balance.

'Civil society' is used in this article to describe the agency involved in transnational activism. This term has been chosen rather than 'social movement(s)' following Tarrow's (2001) disaggregation of transnational activism into three sets of actors: International NGOs (INGO), Transnational Advocacy Networks (TAN) and Transnational Social Movement (TNSM). The key distinction for Tarrow is what organisations do rather than what they say - engage in 'contentious politics' (transnational social movements) or in 'routine transactions' (TANs and INGOs). Transnational campaigns such as those on debt, included all three sets of actors, and it is for this reason that the broader term 'civil society' is used to cover this wide span of agency. Different terms are also applied to civil society groups operating across a number of countries - transnational, international or global civil society. The term transnational is used in this article, defined as the involvement of groups from two or more countries in joint action to challenge international public policy. Global civil society, used by a range of thinkers, contains stronger claims than does the term 'transnational'. It suggests the emergence of a new global societal force in a 'post-sovereign' era, which can help to bridge the democratic deficit within the globalising world, and is a more contested term than transnational civil society (Amoore and Langley 2004, Munck 2004). The term 'international' is used in this article to refer to the formal inter-governmental realms e.g. the IMF and World Bank, but is not applied to civil society.

Methodology

The study was carried out through documentary analysis (primary and secondary), media searches, and interviews with key informants. In terms of documents, my aim was to access material which related as closely as possible to an organisation's strategic thinking, and decision-making processes, such as annual reports, newsletters, strategic plans, evaluations, funding applications, minutes of relevant meetings, and relevant correspondence. Accessing these materials especially for the earlier periods was difficult, as civil society campaigns have not always maintained historical records, with some NGOs abandoning their libraries and archives due to resource constraints. I was sometimes one step behind an NGO closing down its library with the loss of their primary documents, but fortunately, I was also just one step ahead of other organisations about to make their library staff redundant. Continual 'digging' was needed to acquire sufficient material. Documents were gathered from universities, and NGOs in a number of European countries, which included documents from northern and southern campaigns. For the later period of campaigning, there was more substantial material available on the internet. I also had a range of documents I had collected at transnational events, and from visits to southern countries during my years involved with debt campaigning. Considerable material was also sourced from media archives. As much of this material came through press services, most of it was probably never published

in the mainstream media. For research purposes, however, these news services usefully operate as an archive of press releases and reports, reflecting the public face of civil society groups.

Interviews were carried out, some face to face, but the majority by phone, with people who had played a major role in debt campaigning, from debtor countries and creditor countries. These were semi-structured around the research themes, which included south/north relations. Some interviewees spanned the whole period of the research, others spanned the period from the 1990s, while for some, their involvement related to Jubilee 2000. In terms of selecting debtor country campaigns, the criteria were: availability of key informants for interview, and having access to sufficient documentary/media evidence for that country. Coverage of creditor country campaigns focused on Europe, because the range of political cultures involved and their differential positioning within world order, provided substantial variation. Both G7 and non-G7 creditor countries were covered. Focussing on Europe also helped to avoid capture by the dominant English-speaking world.

The fact that I was an insider researcher had advantages, but also brought a range of challenges. I had substantial knowledge of transnational debt campaigns and a wide network of contacts which were useful in terms of identifying relevant interviewees, and gaining access to internal organisational material. There were, however, a range of possible pitfalls. Any individual participant in a transnational movement will always have only a partial view, no matter how long or deep has been the involvement, and s/he is likely to be biased towards particular understandings. This calls for critical distance to avoid accepting, without scrutiny, taken-for-granted understandings which underpin movements. One such issue for me was to recognise when, and the degree to which, debt groups, particularly in the north, were drawn into participation with national and international decision-makers. Civil society groups' preferred understanding is that they are challenging dominant powers from an autonomous position.

The article first provides a brief overview of three decades of debt campaigning set against the background of the changing world order, within which this took place. The south/north relationship evolved within this context. The next section traces south/north relations within debt campaigning with a particular focus on the Jubilee 2000 campaign, which was the most high profile phase of debt campaigning, had the greatest involvement from groups across the south and the north of the globe, and in which south/north tensions became most acute. The third section looks at explanations of south/north relations within transnational civil society/social movements, and is followed by a concluding section.

1. Overview of three decades of debt campaigning

Transnational debt campaigning began to emerge from the early 1980s, with the development of transnational links covering much of the globe, between civil society groups concerned about the negative impacts of the debt crisis. It is significant that this took place in the absence of the developments in information technology, and cheaper travel, which were available to later transnational civil society groups. Action took place at national and transnational levels, including national protests against the austerity programmes ('structural adjustment') which were a condition for debt relief; contentious mobilisations at international organisation summits such as the IMF and World Bank 1988 AGM in Berlin, and the 1989 G7 Summit in Paris; and the emergence of national campaigns.

As the decade advanced, a web of national and transnational groups, which provided the framework for debt campaigning for the following two decades, began to emerge. This web was woven from a range of regional and transnational events, involving trade union conferences in Latin America and Africa and a number of south-north civil society events, for example in Oxford in 1987 (UN-NGO 1987), and Lima in 1988 (Conferencia 1988). The early 1990s saw the emergence of more coordinated campaigning, involving a shift in emphasis from contentious mobilisations to lobbying national and international decision-makers. The most high profile phase of debt campaigning, Jubilee 2000, was launched in 1997. It was based on linking the biblical concept of a periodic Jubilee, whereby right relations are restored – debt cancelled, land redistributed, and slaves freed - with the upcoming millennium as a new Jubilee moment.

The central campaign call was for the cancellation of unpayable debt of the poorest countries by the year 2000. It involved massive mobilisations across the globe, with a particular focus on G7 Summits. The G7 was identified as the key power broker as it dominated the main international for a, which dealt with the debt of southern countries – the IMF, World Bank and the Paris Club of bilateral creditors. Over 24 million signatures to a Jubilee petition were gathered worldwide; 70,000 people demonstrated at the 1998 G7 Birmingham Summit, and 35,000 at the Cologne G7 Summit the following year. It was originally envisaged by the British campaign, which initiated Jubilee 2000 that the campaign would finish at the end of the year 2000. Due, however, to the level of mobilisation achieved, the limited progress on cancellation, and 'pressure from below' from debt campaigners, Jubilee 2000 continued beyond the year 2000, albeit with a lower profile, and was central to the Global call for Action against Poverty/Make Poverty History campaign 2004-2005. A range of debt deals were introduced by creditors over the 1980s and 1990s, all requiring debtor countries to implement IMF/World Bank structural adjustment programmes, promoting the neoliberal agenda of liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation, but delivering limited cancellation.

Debt campaigning took place against the background of a radically changing world order. Over the course of the 1980s the neoliberal counter-revolution was

underway (Toye 1993), central to which was a de-politicisation of the structural inequalities within the international political economy. During the 1970s, southern governments had pressed for a new international economic order to tackle structural inequalities between the south and north, but these inequalities were now increasingly attributed to failures by southern governments (Mawdsley and Rigg 2003), rather than seen as arising largely from how southern countries were integrated into the world economy. This process was exacerbated by the debt crisis, as it provided a lever whereby debtor states could be restructured in line with the neo-liberal counter-revolution, through policy conditions attached to the receipt of debt relief, aid and loans, increasing the hierarchical structuring of states within world order.

However, although these changes were under way when transnational debt campaigning developed during the 1980s, an alternative world order still seemed a possibility. Many debt activists held on to their counter-discourses of a new international economic order, which they adopted from southern governments, and liberation theology which was particularly strong in Latin America. They also maintained solidarity with revolutionary struggles, and the governments emerging from those struggles, such as the Sandinistas who took power in Nicaragua 1979. Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, the space for alternatives appeared to diminish with the triumph of neoliberalism. The concept of 'global governance', referring to the way in which the globalising world was to be governed in the absence of any centralised world authority, gained ground.

Global governance consists of rules, norms and voluntary agreements developed and implemented by a variety of bodies, including inter-governmental organisations, such as the IMF, World Bank, World Trade Organisation (WTO), private bodies such as Credit Rating Agencies and international treaties. This system suffers from a clear democratic deficit, and in order to gain legitimacy for the operation of global governance, the participation of civil society in policy processes became a global norm (Gaynor 2010). Given the limited possibilities to pose alternatives, many debt groups moved towards more direct engagement with the international financial institutions in the early 1990s. To gain the necessary 'credibility' with dominant decision-makers, in order to be able to take advantage of these new participation spaces, many debt campaigns aligned their analyses and proposed solutions with those of the most progressive parts of the inter-governmental organisations dealing with debt.

Triumphant neoliberalism soon began to fracture due to internal strains and external pressures. The liberalisation of finance contributed to a new cycle of debt crises – 1994 Mexico, 1997 East Asia, 1998 Russia, 2001 Argentina, (and later the US and Europe). The unremitting cycle of financial crises dented the claim that there were no alternatives to neoliberal policies. These internal strains were paralleled by external challenges from social movements and civil society networks. In 1994 the Zapatistas emerged in Mexico in opposition to the North American Free Trade Area, and to the neoliberal policies followed by the Mexican government. The Zapatistas played a central role in promoting

transnational resistance to neoliberalism, organising an Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity against Neoliberalism in Chiapas in 1996 (Morton 2002). In 1995, sustained strikes in France were framed as opposition to 'global markets', leading to the emergence of ATTAC in 1998, calling for a tax on financial transactions. ATTAC subsequently played a central role in the establishment of the World Social Forum in 2001 (Ancelevici 2002).

The first major Jubilee 2000 mobilisation took place at the 1998 G7 Summit in Birmingham and, in the same year, the OECD's proposal for a Multilateral Agreement on Investment was defeated by "network guerrillas, a loose coalition of NGOs" (de Jonquiere 1998). In 1999, the 'Battle of Seattle', which can be seen as the start of a new phase of the anti-globalisation movement, took place at the WTO's Ministerial Meeting. This form of active mobilisation continued into the new millennium with further contentious mobilisations against the IMF and the World Bank, and significant protests at G7 Summits between 2000 and 2005. Against this background debt movements took different approaches at different times. They maintained their counter-hegemonic discourses during the 1980s, and leveraged the invited spaces provided by global governance to seek incremental changes in debt policy during the first half of the 1990s. From 1997 onwards, in the Jubilee phase, they used a mixture of social movement mobilisations together with institutional engagement with national and transnational decision-makers.

2. South/north relations within debt campaigning

The importance of south/north relations for effective transnational civil society action, was already under discussion during the 1980s. There were calls from gatherings of southern NGOs for northern NGOs to focus on changing the policies of their governments, and of multilateral organisations, which negatively impacted on southern countries. Rather than engaging directly in development efforts in southern countries, the role of northern NGOs should be to support southern groups to carry out country level projects. Two key declarations raising these issues were the Manila Declaration, June 1989, on People's Participation and Sustainable Development, prepared by 31 Southern NGOs; and the 1990 Arusha Declaration: The African Charter for Popular Participation in Development and Transformation, proposed by a large group of NGOs and African grassroots organizations, with representatives of northern NGOs, governments, and multilateral organisations also present (de Senillosa 1998).

Discussion also took place at transnational debt events on how southern and northern groups could best work together. An underlying question was how to decide on priority issues, on the solutions to pursue, and on what was the most appropriate division of labour between southern and northern debt groups. While the principled position might be that southern groups should lead, there was recognition that northern groups had their own challenges to face. A southern speaker at a 1987 conference in Oxford, UK, pointed out that northern

groups would need to identify which of the issues raised by southern groups would resonate best with their own publics. Issues which mobilise people in the south, might not be equally effective in the north (UN-NGO 1987). There was also an issue of where solidarity with southern people fitted in with competing national/regional campaign priorities in the north. According to a speaker from the Netherlands at a debt conference in Lima in 1988, the massive campaign against cruise missiles in Europe had diverted attention from solidarity with southern countries, making it difficult to respond to calls from the south for greater action on debt (Rahman 1988). While southern and northern groups were groping towards a modus operandi, issues of leadership, of autonomy of action, and the direction of accountability remained grey areas, as was manifested in tensions, which arose within the first structured south/north network, the Forum on Debt and Development (Fondad). This network was set up in 1987 involving Latin American groups, and a number of major Dutch NGOs, with a secretariat in The Hague, and membership in Brazil, Nicaragua, Peru and Chile. The purpose of the network was to promote debate on debt policies, to work together to influence international decision-makers and to engage with Ministries of Finance, and other key figures at national level, with illegitimate debt as a strong concern in Latin America. Tensions arose within the network over the respective roles of Latin American and European Fondad, including differences over policy, decision-making, and ownership. One issue was whether priority should be given to strengthening the work of individual organisations or developing joint work. As is often the case in south/north joint working, the fact that the northern (Dutch) partner in the network was also the funder, impacted on relationships. Finally, at a meeting in the early 1990s, the network was dissolved, and it was agreed that the European and Latin American organisations would operate independently of each other (Interviewee Netherlands No. 1, Interviewee Coordinator Eurodad).

South/north relations within debt campaigning during the early 1990s were loose and related to specific issues and events. Southern groups provided expert information and legitimacy to northern groups through their contribution to northern conferences and public events. They also introduced their priorities into transnational debt campaigning with the issue of illegitimate debt highlighted by the Philippines Freedom from Debt Coalition, and budget monitoring, responsible lending and borrowing were raised by the Uganda Debt Network. Northern groups became more involved in lobbying their governments, international financial institutions and the G7 for changes in international debt policy, as was envisaged in the various southern declarations referred to above. It is difficult, however, to define an equitable division of labour between groups placed unequally within a hierarchical world order, as any such agreement is likely to reflect those inequalities. The division of labour set out above, while made in good faith, appeared to lock in these inequalities, with northern groups being the access point to creditors, and therefore being in a stronger position to influence the terms of the debate on the causes of, and possible solutions, to the debt problem. While major south/north tensions did

not emerge during this period, the contradictions thrown up by northern groups moving into this role, came to a head in the Jubilee 2000 campaign.

Solidarity between south/north debt groups was the bedrock of Jubilee 2000. The shift from a charity to a justice approach, involving the, over-used, concept of partnership, called for more equitable relationships, as once northern NGOs claimed to reflect the views of their 'southern partners', their legitimacy increasingly depended on those partners. Information exchanges, central to transnational campaigns continued. Providing a platform in northern countries to southern groups by inviting representatives to visit was mutually helpful. It raised the profile of the debt problem of individual countries by giving southern campaigners access to decision-makers, the media, and the public within creditor countries. Southern visitors helped northern groups to mobilise their publics, giving the northern groups greater legitimacy with national decision-makers, and the media, and helping them strengthen their domestic support, key to their fund raising. South/north relations became a major source of tension, however, leading to the emergence of an autonomous movement of southern debt groups - Jubilee South. Tensions arose in relation to leadership, representation, and how the campaign was formulated, framed and funded. The following sections review these tensions in terms of organisational structure, and in relation to debt discourse.

Tensions arising from organisational structures

In spite of its wide geographical span, there were no formal international structures, with Jubilee 2000 operating through sets of interweaving networks. National campaigns, together with a number of regional networks, loosely aggregated up into the transnational campaign. Many members of these national networks were also engaged in their own transnational networks, leading to dense relationships within Jubilee 2000. An NGO, for example, could work on debt within its bilateral relationships with its southern or northern partners, at the same time be a member of the national debt coalition of the country in which it was based, and also be a member of regional networks such as Afrodad, Eurodad, and Latindad. Networking, therefore, took place largely through regional networks and events, with a range of declarations issued by these fora: Accra 19 April 1998, Tegucigalpa 27 January 1999, Gauteng 21 March 1999 and Lusaka 19-21 May 1999. The European Network on Debt and Development (Eurodad), set up in 1989, operated parallel to, and in interaction with, Jubilee 2000. It provided a forum for European organisations, and its annual conferences brought together representatives of northern and southern debt groups. Within this loose structure, the obligations on members of Jubilee 2000 were fairly light – to agree with the principles and aim of the campaign – and beyond that, groups had autonomy in terms of how they campaigned (Cox 2011, Pettifor 2005). The UK Jubilee group which initiated the campaign, operated informally as a transnational hub and catalyst. Only one transnational meeting, bringing together Jubilee groups from across the globe, took place in the run up to the millennium, in Rome in 1998.

The absence of an international structure in Jubilee 2000 provided flexibility, with autonomy for national groups, but it left the door open to the ‘tyranny of structurelessness’, the informal leadership of the best resourced campaigns, which took strategic decisions without proper consultation (Buxton 2004). There was little enthusiasm, however, for formal international structures from those attending the transnational Jubilee meeting in 1998, or from those interviewed for this research. There was a reluctance to use scarce resources setting up international structures, a sense that these processes can be a ‘nightmare’, and could end up demotivating people (Interviewee Germany No. 2). There was also recognition that tensions are endemic between groups differently positioned across the south /north interface, and that patience is needed if this work is to be successful (Interviewee Peru). Jubilee 2000 UK opposed an international steering committee, believing that trying to build a “democratic, accountable global, borderless body, outside framework of the state was delusional and utopian” (Pettifor 2005, 312). What was needed was to coordinate activities internationally, on the basis of agreement by national coalitions (Pettifor 2005).

The value of a loose, decentred networking format is that it can recede and regenerate itself, as involvement in an issue ebbs and flows over time, and it can also absorb tensions, and conflicts. In the case of transnational debt campaigns, its horizontal form was seen as facilitative, enabling people to work together, calling for the same things without having to spend a lot of time making agreements and resolving differences. Loose transnational networking is based on an implied assumption of relatively equally positioned members, but lacks a mechanism to rebalance inequalities of power (Surman and Reilly 2003), especially those which reflect external power structures. This situates the south/north interface as a particular fault-line within transnational campaigning.

In terms of leadership, northern domination in formulating transnational campaigns was expressed starkly by one southern debt campaigner: “Campaign themes and goals are defined in the North and then followers are recruited in the South” (Bendaña 2005, 83). While Jubilee 2000, and the later Make Poverty History/Global Call for Action against Poverty, were seen as good campaigns, southern groups highlighted the fact that the strategies, methods, and slogans, were already decided before southern groups were included. There was also a sense that campaigns followed a formula, which did not always resonate with the varying social and political situations across different countries (Eurodad 2005). This meant that northern exigencies, priorities, and framings came to shape the campaign. A major priority for northern NGOs was seen as short term ‘deliverables’, and this could create tensions with those coming from a social movement perspective (Interviewee Italy). The Jubilee campaign was launched in Britain in October 1997, in Africa in April 1998, in Latin America in January 1999, and, given that the campaign was due to finish at the end of the year 2000, this left a very short campaigning time frame. Many southern campaigns were only getting off the ground by the millennium, and, given the particular resource, physical and communication infrastructure

limitations faced, they needed time to build popular campaigns. Information received by the Uganda Debt Network, for example, had to be translated into at least five languages before being disseminated (Buxton 2002).

There was a 'hullabaloo' in Africa when Jubilee 2000 was moving to close down after the millennium, with campaigners arguing,

No this campaign can't stop, these issues are still here... We strongly protested... Many people would be distrustful of campaigns coming from the north and two years action" (Interviewee Uganda).

While the short time line was meant to leverage the symbolism of the upcoming millennium, this was also in line with northern NGO practice of moving to new campaign issues every couple of years. British campaigners argued, however, that the short time line was central to the dynamic of the campaign, as it enabled organisations to commit to the debt issue for a short period (Pettifor 2005). Competition for profile and funds created 'organisational egotism' in NGOs, as subsuming their individual identities within a high-profile campaign such as Jubilee 2000, meant they didn't get the credit for their individual contributions (Interviewee Sweden). In the case of the British coalition, its NGO members worried that Jubilee 2000 "was taking its campaigners away and overshadowing its work" (Cox 2011, 37). While the short time line may have been seen as central for northern groups, for southern groups, issues were "goal bound not time bound" (Jubilee Zambia 2001). Southern groups argued that the voice of those carrying the debt burden should be central to campaign design, taking on board their particular experience, and understanding, and the time- frame should fit their needs in terms of building support, and their ability to leverage their greater mobilisation potential. Northern campaigners needed to commit for the long haul; it was a marathon not a sprint. As stated above, following pressure from campaigners in the south and north, Jubilee 2000 continued beyond the year 2000, albeit at a lower level of mobilisation, and with a lower international profile.

A further central issue which contributed to the south/north tension was: who spoke for the campaign? The lack of a transnational decision-making process proved to be a serious fault-line, when some northern campaigns gave a qualified positive response to the 1999 Cologne Debt Deal, without discussion with southern campaigns. This deal was announced by the G7 Summit which met in Cologne, surrounded by a human chain of Jubilee 2000 campaigners from across the globe, and to which the millions of signatures to the Jubilee petition were submitted. The Cologne debt deal increased the level of debt cancellation on offer, but kept structural adjustment conditions in place. A new condition was added whereby debtor governments had to adopt a Poverty Reduction Strategy with the participation of civil society. Savings from debt reduction, together with aid and other resources, had to be spent implementing this plan, which first had to be endorsed by the IMF and World Bank. Commenting on the Cologne deal, the Director of Jubilee 2000 UK: "...the package was a significant step which showed the power of the debt-relief movement. 'But we are not there yet,' she added. 'We are at stage one.'"(Elliott

1999). This was seen as northern groups speaking for the south, and evoked serious anger among southern campaigners in Cologne. A spokesperson for Jubilee Zambia articulated these concerns:

“Supporters in the north ...must not be misled by claims made by G7 leaders or officials of the World Bank and IMF that "major breakthroughs" have occurred... Equally urgent is the need to listen to the voices in the south that flatly challenge the HIPC and ESAF approaches as unacceptable” (Henriot 1999).

In addition to the solidarity relationship, there is often a donor relationship between southern and northern campaigning groups. In fact, most southern debt campaigns depended on northern campaigns, and organisations for funding (Buxton 2004). The Uganda Debt Network, for example, had 33 northern NGO funders in 1999, some funding specific projects, others providing core funding (Uganda Debt Network 1999). Funding of southern groups by northern NGOs, while a form of solidarity, can also operate as a form of control. Northern NGO donors may choose to support groups most closely aligned with their own perspectives (Buxton 2004, Keet 2000), and so strengthen the NGOs’ overall power position within transnational networks. The Philippines Freedom from Debt Coalition, however, pointed out that southern campaigns are not solely in a dependent relationship with their northern funders. Although in receipt of northern NGO funding, “the partnerships we forge are not mainly to get assistance. FDC [Freedom from Debt Coalition] is a major player in the global campaign” (Freedom from Debt Coalition 1992). As pointed out above, southern groups also influenced the agenda of transnational networks, inserting their own priorities.

Contested framings of debt

The ability to shape people’s minds is the fundamental source of power in the network society (Sey and Castells 2004). How issues are framed is therefore central to the common cause which underpins the power of transnational civil society campaigning, and reflects the level of change sought, and understandings of the power to be contested.

A major fault-line between the south and north in transnational debt campaigning was how debt should be framed – as unpayable because of the unacceptable human cost, or as illegitimate because of the power relations surrounding the creation, and management of debt. In lobbying creditor governments and institutions, the human development argument was easier to run, as it chimed with the dominant discourse of human development/ poverty reduction. But southern groups pointed out that framing debt purely as a human development problem, implicitly legitimised it. They highlighted the historic, economic, ecological, and social debt owed to them. An historic debt is owed because European colonial powers built their own development on wealth plundered from the south. This historic debt dwarfed the amounts now claimed by northern creditors’ from southern countries. In addition to its historic roots,

debt arises from the current unfair and exploitative international economic and financial systems. The Southern Peoples' Ecological Debt Creditors' Alliance argues that an ecological debt is owed because of the overuse of the resources of the planet by industrialised countries, through their model of production, and consumption. This process, which is accelerated by globalisation, has led to environmental degradation, resource depletion, climate change and other negative effects (Deuda Ecológica 2008). Loans made to past repressive regimes, such as in Argentina, the Philippines and South Africa, have been defined as 'odious'. These loans neither benefited the people who ended up burdened by that debt, nor had they consented to those loans being taken on, and this was known to the creditors at the time of granting the loans (Hanlon 2006). Further, where private loans have been converted to public debt in order to bail out lenders, this has also been declared illegitimate by debt campaigners (Hanlon 2006). Southern groups placed the conventional debtor/creditor relationship on its head, asking 'who owes what to whom', and declared themselves to be the creditors.

The legitimacy of debt had been challenged in the south from the start of the crisis. For the Philippines Freedom from Debt Coalition, set up in 1988 and the longest running debt campaign in the world, freedom from illegitimate debt was always central to their campaign. In the early 1990s they documented the fraudulent nature of some of their loans, and opposed their repayment (Pineda-Ofreneo 1991). Jubilee South Africa delegitimised as 'apartheid debt' both the debt run up by the apartheid regime, and that incurred by neighbouring countries, as a result of aggression from South Africa (Rustomjee 2004). Given the heavy price paid by Zambia, as leader of the front lines states in the struggle against apartheid, Jubilee Zambia asked:

Is it ethically acceptable to expect Zambia to pay back debts entered into because of a moral fight against apartheid?should not some form of reparations be expected from those who profited from investments, trade and political support that maintained the Pretoria regime in power for so many years? (Jubilee Zambia 2003a).

In Argentina a court decision in 2000 recognised the illegitimate nature of much of the debt dating from the brutal military regime 1976 to 1983 (Pettifor, Cisneros and Olmos-Gaona 2001). Nicaraguan and Honduran Jubilee campaigns were fuelled by the odious/illegitimate nature of their debts. This motivated: '...a wider variety of organisations for whom technical issues on debt... normally been something they would've disengaged from; something so complex, with the locus of power around it so far away'. (Interviewee INGO Central America).

Creditor country campaigns also questioned the legitimacy of their respective state's claims. They pointed to the use of export guarantee agencies to promote lending in the interest of the creditor country. The French debt campaign, *Plateforme Dette et Développement*, highlighted that almost half of debt cancelled by France resulted from "irresponsible, if not criminal", export guarantees by COFACE, France's export guarantee agency, to countries at war,

and notorious dictatorships such as Iraq, Nigeria and Zaire (Merckaert 2005). Ninety-five per cent of British debt was also run up through its Export Credit Guarantee Department, and most of these loans “aggressively promoted British exports, particularly arms. This is part of creditors’ instrument in their competition against other OECD countries” (Pettifor 1998, 119).

It was not, therefore, a simple case that southern groups focussed on the illegitimacy of debt, and northern groups focused on its unpayability, but which frame was most centrally promoted. The underlying question was: should the aim be to delegitimise the debt, or to focus on its terrible human impact? Where did the solution to the crisis lie – in debtors repudiating illegitimate debt, or in creditors cancelling unpayable debt? While no Jubilee group rejected the argument that debt had unacceptable human costs, southern campaigners pointed out that the human development argument bypasses the question of how the debts were accumulated, and who benefited (Nacpil no date). To focus solely on unpayable debt could lead campaigns in the north towards a charity approach, while disempowering southern people who would have to plead for cancellation on the basis of their poverty, rather than assert their right to repudiate illegitimate debt (Keet 2000).

As pointed out above, the understandings on which the common cause which holds campaigns together are based, are often fragile, with tensions arising, leading to the need for renegotiation. Such a renegotiation took place at the transnational Jubilee 2000 meeting in Rome 1998, with the meaning of unpayable redefined to include odious debt lent to repressive regimes. This more radical framing can be seen in southern debt declarations:

The debt is illegitimate because, in large measure, it was contracted by dictatorships... as well as by governments which were formally democratic, but corrupt. Most of the money was not used to benefit the people who are now being required to pay it back” (Tegucigalpa Declaration 1999).

Latin American campaigners went on to appeal to northern campaigns not to call for less than southern groups were proposing (Tegucigalpa Declaration 1999).

From an African perspective, the Lusaka Declaration 1999 endorsed “the collective repudiation of illegitimate foreign debt payments”. But there can be a fault-line between agreed discourse and how this is actually operationalised. Keet (2000) points to slippage from more radical frames agreed at the Rome conference, to calls for ‘debt relief’ and ‘debt reduction’, which happened when northern debt groups were ‘grappling’ with their governments (Keet 2000, 462). A particular slippage was privileging ‘unpayable’ over ‘odious’ or ‘illegitimate’ debt. This reflects the move made by many northern debt groups to align their analyses and proposals with those of the most progressive positions of international decision-makers, in order to leverage the participation spaces which opened up in the early 1990s.

Setting up Jubilee South

The outcome of these tensions was the launch of Jubilee South at a south/south summit in Johannesburg in November 1999, involving representatives of southern Jubilee campaigns, and social movements (Jubilee South no date). There had been a proposal to set up a radical world debt movement based on ideological affinity, involving southern and northern groups rather than one based on southern identity, but an autonomous southern network was the preferred strategy of those promoting Jubilee South (Interviewee Belgium No. 2). While some northern campaigns saw the establishment of Jubilee South as a split (Interviewee Belgium No. 1, Interviewee Britain, Interviewee Germany No. 2), Jubilee South aimed to rearticulate south/north relations, rather than to break them.

An outcome of the south-south summit was an invitation to south/north dialogues at regional level. The aim was to explore areas of convergence, strengthen areas of agreement, and identify differences on major issues, where further dialogue would be necessary (Jubilee South no date). Two south/north dialogues were subsequently called by Jubilee South, one in Dakar in 2000, and the other one in Cuba in 2005. A significant innovation was that northern groups were invited to co-convene the latter events, including developing the agenda, and managing conference processes, thus modelling a more equitable form of engagement. This was not a simple south/north ideological division, however, as differences also existed between southern groups, and some northern groups maintained radical positions. Differences in Latin America led to the establishment of Latindadd parallel to Jubilee South America. While Jubilee Zambia made common cause with Jubilee South on apartheid debt and on the role of the IMF and World Bank,

We made it very clear that we would be inside as well, engaging with the IMF and World Bank, we would be engaging in the process of debt reduction (Interviewee Zambia).

Following the establishment of Jubilee South, efforts were made to bridge the gap, which had opened up between southern and northern groups. Part of this involved northern groups placing greater emphasis on the illegitimacy of debt. Influenced by Jubilee South, the Norwegian debt campaign organised a tribunal in 2002, on Norway's illegitimate debt, focusing on a particular government lending programme, which sold defective ships to southern countries. The tribunal, facilitated by a Supreme Court judge, concluded that this debt should be cancelled immediately, and unconditionally (SLUG 2003), and in 2006 a newly elected Norwegian government cancelled this debt unconditionally (Abildsnes 2007). Norway also made funds available to UNCTAD, and the World Bank, to research the concept of odious debt in international law (Jubilee USA 2008), bringing the issue of illegitimate debt to the heart of the international system. Before this, creditor governments and international institutions refused to even hear questions on the legitimacy of debt, with government ministers referring to this as "pulling on a dead horse" (Interviewee Netherlands No. 2) or "shouting in the woods with a high risk of getting one's

mouth filled with cones” (Abildsnes 2007, 6). In 2007, debt campaigns in G7 country debt campaigns published a report, documenting examples of illegitimate debts arising from their respective countries’ lending (Joint NGO Report. 2007). When President Correa set up a debt audit to determine the legitimacy of Ecuador’s debt, he invited experts from southern and northern debt groups to take part. Following completion of this audit, Ecuador repudiated part of its debt in 2008 (Molina Vera 2008).

3. Analysing south/north relations within transnational campaigning

In light of the difficulties, which arose between southern and northern groups within debt campaigning, a liberal view of civil society as a normative, autonomous space, positioned between market and state – a view widely held by civil society groups themselves (Cohen and Arato 1992) - is inadequate. Rather, civil society reflects the existing inequalities within the international system (Munck 2004, Pasha1998). The debt crisis, which created a stark divide between creditor and debtor countries, interacted with the neoliberal counter revolution to create an increasingly unequal world order. These inequalities then impacted on south/north relations within debt campaigning. Tensions arose, not just in relation to northern groups’ dominance within debt campaigning, but also because of the levers of power, which could be operated by northern groups within the international system. Conditionality, promoting liberalisation, de-regulation and privatisation, was a key tool used by the international system to enforce neoliberalism on debtor governments, and became a major area of contention within transnational debt movements.

Some northern groups, while not supporting the neoliberal economic agenda, advocated that ‘positive conditionality’ be attached to debt reduction, aid and concessionary loans (e.g. social conditions laying out how these resources should be spent), in order to pressure southern governments to direct resources towards marginalised people. Southern groups, fearing a further weakening of their fragile sovereignty (Keck and Sikkink 1998), resisted the redirection of state accountability away from citizens, and towards external donors, and creditors, calling rather for ‘conditionality-from-below’ (Jubilee Zambia 2003b, 2001), involving civil society groups in monitoring how money released by debt cancellation would be used. A purely structural explanation of the south/north relationship, however, can only be partial, and runs the risk of suggesting that a north/south divide is inevitable (Doherty 2006). The actual processes through which south/north relationships operate within transnational campaigns, must also be examined.

Transnational civil society groups operate through different organisational forms which may impact differently on south/north linkages. A major distinction can be made between solidarity groups supporting people in struggle, motivated by a common ideological commitment (‘those violated share our cause’), and transnational advocacy networks, which tackle specific issues

from a perspective of principles/rights, regardless of the ideological affinity of those affected (Keck and Sikkink 1998, 15). Relations between southern and northern participants in these respective formats are subject to different degrees of conflict (Bob 2005, Keet 2000). Bob (2005) presents transnational civil society as a marketplace for transnational support, with demand (from southern groups) greatly outweighing supply (from northern groups). While he accepts that northern groups are motivated by altruism and principles, the needs of organisations providing support (INGOs) play a major role in shaping which southern groups get international backing, and how issues are framed, and targeted. Some issues have greater international resonance at different times, such as the environment, or human rights. Northern groups may, therefore, influence how southern groups they are supporting frame issues, so that they will resonate with current international discourses.

In terms of the debt movements, framing the problem within a human development perspective, resonated better with the discourses of international donors and financial institutions, than did the concept of illegitimate debt. The south/north interface is further complicated by the fact that NGOs from the north may set up 'territorial deployments' in southern countries - local offices which may become 'domesticated' over time, employing local people, and establishing locally based management structures (Latham 2001). These local offices maintain strong links back to their parent bodies. Sorj (2005, 23) goes further suggesting that establishing local offices in southern countries, Northern NGOs may be "contracting some of the best local cadres and sometimes even "buying" local NGOs". A range of questions arise in relation to local offices of northern NGOs in southern countries. Are southern chapters of northern NGOs part of local civil society, or are they operating from an externally set agenda? Whose voice is heard - the representatives of northern NGOs, or autonomous southern organisations? A study of IMF engagement with civil society groups in a number of African countries, found that the few IMF contacts have tended to involve the local offices of northern based NGOs, such as Oxfam (Scholte 2012).

Bob (2005) and Keet (2000) argue that solidarity groups are less likely than INGOs to play a role in reshaping the goals and targets of southern groups given the greater degree of shared understandings which underpins the solidarity relationship. It is not surprising, therefore, that tensions can be more acute in advocacy networks than in solidarity groups. According to Keck and Sikkink (1998), it is difficult to sustain advocacy networks made up of both those directly affected by the problem being tackled, and those motivated by altruism. This difference can lead to network breakdown and new networks emerging based on 'communities of fate' (those experiencing the problem being contested). In the context of the south/north tensions which arose within the debt movements, Reitan (2007) describes Jubilee 2000 as a hybrid network, involving both elements of northern 'altruistic solidarity', and directly involved activists from the south, with Jubilee South emerging as an identity based network of those affected by the debt problem.

Relationships within transnational networks do not necessarily operate evenly between members. Regional networks can play a significant role, as they did within debt campaigning, through Eurodad, Afrodad and later Latindadd. At an operational level, however, south/north relations took the form of bilateral relations to a significant extent, with northern groups choosing to work mainly with those with whom they had a fair amount of common ground. Radical groups in France, for example, linked into parallel groups in the south, while Spain's Jubilee campaign worked with faith-based groups in Latin America, rather than with the emerging radical voices of Jubilee South (Interviewee France; Interviewee Germany No. 1; Interviewee Ireland; Interviewee Spain). Differences arising from the disparate positioning of their countries within the international system can be more easily factored into bilateral relationships, as can issues of decision-making and voice. Evidence of this was the absence of reports of significant stresses within these bilateral relations during the course of this research.

It is more difficult to absorb these differences at a wider transnational level. The most acute tensions arose in relation to the international profile of Jubilee, where different experiences of the debt crisis, and differing ideological positions on how to tackle it, came together, and where there were no agreed organisational structures to try to manage differences. While at the level of mobilising, operating through a loose, decentred network of autonomous groups was very effective, when it came to the interface with international decision-makers and the media, Jubilee 2000 became re-centred with the UK, the strongest national campaign and promoter of the transnational Jubilee network, becoming the spokesperson. This poses challenging questions about organising transnational civil society campaigns, when more diffuse, heterogeneous civil society groups as part of 'globalisation-from-below', meet the more united, homogenous 'globalisation-from-above' (Falk 1997), within which the international institutions dealing with debt are situated.

In terms of how the south/north inequalities within transnational civil society can be tackled, some thinkers highlight the need for action from northern NGOs to 'empower' the south, to enable them to operate within global networks (Katz 2006). A range of absences within southern groups which need to be tackled, are highlighted – lack of funds, lack of capacity, lack of access to central decision-makers (Buxton 2004), and lack of the "organisational and political know-how needed to engage successfully in global networks" (Katz 2006, 346). From a southern perspective, however, there are also weaknesses in northern groups' ability to tackle global injustices. The limited political space in the north, with the media dominating politics, leads to an over reliance on marketing, and public relations approaches to campaigning, and the absence of sustained mobilisations. As a result, social movement approaches are stronger in the south, and campaigning is stronger in the north, albeit that social movements occur in the north and campaigning take place in the south (Bendana 2005). Doherty and Doyle (2012, 172) also highlight differences between activism in the south and the north:

“Protest in the north is a temporary coming together of the voice of protest on a particular day.... while in the south, communities protest where they already exist. They do not go home to a non-political space after the protest is over”.

Sorje (2005, 14) relates this weakness in northern mobilisations to the emergence of NGOs in recent times, who, lacking a significant social base from which they can exert political pressure, advance their agendas through ad hoc social mobilisations, aimed at gaining media coverage.

The struggles within the debt movements between south and north, outlined above, can be seen as a contestation of the ‘second face of power’. The first face of power involves the direct operation of power as when one actor induces another to do something s/he would not otherwise have done (Dahl 1986). The second face of power relates to the indirect operation of power through the in-built biases in organisations, in terms of how decisions are made, how agendas are set, including issues being kept off the agenda. Power can be exercised by limiting the scope of decision-making to ‘relatively safe issues’ (e.g. focussing on the human impact of debt, rather than on its illegitimacy), or limiting the agenda to issues which suit dominant groups’ preferences (Bachrach and Baratz 1962). As was outlined in section 2 above, tensions within transnational debt campaigns arose in relation to organisational and agenda setting issues. This contestation of the second face of power within debt campaigning, led to a reconfiguration of south/north relations with the establishment of Jubilee South, resulting in illegitimate debt becoming central to the agenda after 2000, more equitable forms of south/north engagement and dispersed leadership.

The differences between southern and northern contexts, perspectives and practices, together with the struggles to which they gave rise within transnational debt campaigning, suggest that claims that a global civil society is emerging within a ‘post sovereign’ world (Kaldor 2003, Scholte 1999), are premature. Rather, transnational civil society is a process whereby national groups continually aggregate up into transnational civil society, while simultaneously disaggregating back into its constituent parts. Sorj (2005) presents the south/north divide as a key fault-line in the concept of a global civil society. While the diffusion of ideas across national and regional boundaries is a major source of social change, he points out that inequalities between the south/north have a significant impact on the intellectual and material resources needed to create global agendas, with ‘universal validity’ (Sorj, 20). Rather than a universalist agenda forming the basis of transnational civil society, however, there is a tendency for northern networks to claim the global and the universal, while southern networks are defined as local and provincial (Evans 2008, Basu 2000). Southern debt activists, for example, pointed out that European groups tended to define debtor country campaigns as southern, while they defined their own campaigns as international.

Conclusion

Transnational debt campaigning involved two struggles: one was to create and maintain a strong common cause; the other was the struggle for debt cancellation, and to challenge the power relations within which debt was generated, and managed. These were not parallel struggles, but interacted with each other, as the methods of engagement (lobbying or mobilisations), and the different discourse on debt (unpayable debt, or illegitimate debt), generated tensions within the common cause underpinning transnational debt campaigning, particularly along the south/north interface. The south/north relationship within debt movements was, therefore, a dynamic one driven by the continual interaction of solidarity and conflict, in an effort to escape the impact of the inequalities of the hierarchically structured international system. Periodic efforts to establish strong south/north networking, exposed tensions which led, in the case of Fondad, to the dissolution of the south/north link, and in the case of Jubilee 2000, to a reconfiguration of power with the establishment of Jubilee South. This process meant that power differences were continually challenged, and new solidarities were developed in an effort to resolve these, leading to new contradictions.

While the tensions generated within debt campaigning over decades, posed serious difficulties, and were very painful for many, the intensity of the debate about the respective roles of southern and northern groups reflected the success of the campaign in engaging strongly across the south and north, and also across diverging political positions. The fact that these tensions led to a reconfiguration of power within debt movements, rather than disengagement, or a split, can be seen as a commitment to maintaining common cause. This commitment, however, is modified by organisational exigencies and perspectives, particularly of northern groups, whose commitment to particular campaigns ebbs and flows over time, as happened in the case of debt.

The tensions which arise within transnational campaigning along the south/north interface cannot be wished away by cosmopolitan concepts of global civil society, pursuing a universal agenda which resonates across such a global society. This suggests that unitary south/north campaigns, organised around a clear, universal message, and targeted strategy – all considered essential for successful campaigns – may not maximise the strength of the common cause transnationally. Campaigns need to be shaped to take different political, social and cultural contexts into account, and recognise existing power inequalities. South/north relations within transnational networks, however, are not static. It was suggested by a number of interviewees during the course of this research, that the relationship was already changing due to the changes in world power with, for example, India, and Brazil more centrally positioned as members of the G20. It was also suggested that the practice whereby northern groups gathered information from southern groups, and represented these groups to northern decision-makers, is becoming obsolete. Southern groups are no longer as dependent on the north to advocate on their behalf – due to technological diffusion, decreased cost of travel, and a critical mass of southern

groups, they now have greater access to the means to represent themselves. While change is certainly underway, it is important not to exaggerate the extent to which this is reshaping south/north relations, or challenging long established power relationships between southern and northern civil society groups. What is important, however, is to reflect on the diverse experiences of transnational campaigning, such as that on debt, over the past decades, to identify what it is that divides us is, and consider the extent to which these divisions can be overcome.

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Interviews

Interviewee Belgium No. 1: civil society debt informant, interviewed in Brussels, 3 March 2010.

Interviewee Belgium No. 2: civil society debt informant, interviewed by telephone, 19 March 2012.

Interviewee Britain: civil society debt informant, interviewed by Skype, 17 October 2012.

Interviewee France: civil society debt informant, interviewed by telephone, 12 March 2012.

Interviewee Germany No. 1: civil society debt informant, interviewed in Dusseldorf, 30 November 2010.

Interviewee Germany No. 2: civil society debt informant, interviewed in Cologne, 1 December 2010.

Interviewee Ireland: civil society debt informant, interviewed in Maynooth, Ireland, 1 August 2012.

Interviewee Italy: civil society debt informant, interviewed by telephone, 2 May 2012.

Interviewee Netherlands No. 1: civil society debt informant, interviewed by telephone 11 February 2010.

Interviewee Netherlands No. 2: civil society debt informant, interviewed in Zwolle, Netherlands, 1 December 2010.

Interviewee Peru: civil society debt informant, interviewed by Skype, 4 March 2012

Interviewee Spain: civil society debt informant, interviewed by telephone, 6 August 2012.

Interviewee Sweden: civil society debt informant, interviewed by telephone, 14 August 2012.

Interviewee Uganda: civil society debt informant, interviewed by telephone, 30 March 2012.

Interviewee Zambia: civil society debt informant, interviewed by telephone, 30 August 2012.

About the author

Jean Somers coordinated Ireland's campaign for developing country debt cancellation, for 12 years. She completed a PhD in 2014, examining the power of transnational civil society, using debt campaigns as a case study. She has been involved in Debt Justice Action: Anglo-not-our Debt, which campaigns against Ireland's illegitimate debt.

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